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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Messiah College, a religiously affiliated liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, to identify classes that had excellent evaluation procedures. Standardized student ratings of classroom testing were drawn from the Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA), which includes an item on "preparing examinations" as part of the section on teaching methods. Classes that were rated above the 90th percentile on the IDEA on "preparing examinations" were identified as exemplar classes. Instructors of these 17 exemplar courses were contacted, and all agreed to participate in the study and provide descriptions of their evaluation methods. Additionally, 27 randomly selected students completed a brief questionnaire and were individually interviewed about the evaluation methods used in the classes. Results indicated that positive responses to classroom testing procedures were related to external constraints (such as class size and teacher experience), as well as to instructional dynamics within the classroom. Based on study findings, five suggestions were developed for classroom evaluation: (1) be methodical; (2) allow student input regarding specific content of the evaluation process; (3) grant students the freedom to fail on occasion; (4) emphasize the practical; and (5) personalize the requirements. (AC)

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"Good Testing": An Analysis of the Classroom Context

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Data: The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods. Simple descriptive statistics are used to compare the demographics of classes rated as having excellent evaluation procedures to other classes on campus. Faculty descriptions of the evaluation procedures used in the selected classes and student responses to those procedures (as evidenced in questionnaires and interviews) are summarized and analyzed.

Results/Conclusions: Identification of exemplar courses makes it possible to describe characteristics of the select group as compared to other courses in the institution. Analysis of the statistical data suggests five external factors that might increase the likelihood that classroom evaluation will be viewed positively: (1) Have smaller classes. (2) Enroll students in upper division courses within their academic major. (3) Give higher grades. (4) Have classes taught by the most experienced or most inexperienced teachers. (5) Enroll students in performance classes and discourage enrollment in technical or science courses.

Analysis of the qualitative data gathered from teachers and students reveals that there are teacher practices which impact student perceptions of classroom evaluation regardless of institutional constraints. These are summarized in five constructive suggestions that guide classroom evaluation: (1) Be methodical. (2) Allow student input regarding specific content of the evaluation process. (3) Grant students the freedom to fail on occasion without penalty. (4) Emphasize the practical. (5) Personalize the requirements.

Educational Importance: This study delineates the characteristics of evaluation procedures in college classrooms that students have identified as exemplary. The study reveals that positive classroom evaluation procedures are related to some external constraints which are controllable by the institution as well as to instructional dynamics within the classroom.

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"Good Testing": An Analysis of the Classroom Context

Abstract: Seventeen classes on a college campus were identified by students as having had "good testing." Using statistical data, surveys, and interviews, this study compared those exemplar classes to others on campus. Results show that positive classroom testing procedures are related to external constraints, some of which are controllable by the institution, as well as to instructional dynamics within the classroom.

Objectives and Framework: Classroom assessment has recently gained support in part because of a realization that the input of students and teachers has been underutilized in research about instruction. Missed opportunities to gather information based on student and teacher experience are evident in the absence of contextual information surrounding student evaluations of classroom instruction. Reliability and validity statistics may abound, but the meaning and the message of student ratings has been largely unexamined.

In this study, standardized student ratings are used to identify classes that have excellent evaluation procedures. Student ratings were drawn from the Instructional Development and Effectiveness Assessment (IDEA) developed at Kansas State University. As with many such instruments, the IDEA form includes an item on "preparing examinations" as part of the section on teaching methods. While statistics and ratings have been gathered for years using this item, no one, according to the IDEA administrators, has ever researched the characteristics of those classes which receive high marks from students on this item. This study seeks to articulate the characteristics of those classrooms which college students identify as having had excellent testing procedures.

Methods: Faculty at Messiah College, a religiously affiliated liberal arts college located in Grantham, Pennsylvania with an enrollment of 2000, are required to have courses evaluated using the IDEA instrument. Classes which had been rated above the ninetieth percentile (90%) on the item of "Preparing Evaluations" in a given semester were identified as "exemplar" classes, and instructors of these courses were contacted by the institution's faculty development officer and asked if they were willing to participate in this study. Seventeen classes were so identified and 100% of the instructors agreed to complete a survey providing information about their testing procedures. Additionally, twenty-seven randomly selected students from these classes completed a brief questionnaire and were individually interviewed about the evaluation methods used in the identified class.